

Testimony in support of:
House Bill 281: Enact Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act

Submitted By:
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Dear Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee,

Our names are Dr. Celia Williamson, Tony Yerks, and Kiana Cole. We represent the Human Trafficking and Social Justice Institute in Toledo, Ohio. We are in support of removing the derogatory language targeting people with disabilities that is in the sections listed. We believe that this language is hurtful towards human trafficking survivors and should be amended.

At the Human Trafficking and Social Justice Institute, we support survivors of human trafficking who have been through traumatic and heartbreaking situations. As a result of these experiences, many survivors develop mental health issues like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or anxiety/depression. Language in Ohio State Legislation, such as “lunatics,” “mental defective,” and “idiot,” to name a few, is hurtful against survivors and their efforts to find support and mental health services.

The language that we hope to be amended is derogatory and offensive to any individual with a disability or mental health issue, including the survivors of human trafficking in which we advocate for. The terms in question are known to have negative connotations, and their place in the Ohio legislature enables their use by the general population. These slurs can make the targeted population feel unsafe, unvalued, and ostracized from their communities. Furthermore, the use of the language facilitates society’s stereotypes and stigmas often used against individuals with disabilities, which can deter them from seeking out services out of fear of being labeled. This language directly influences how the disabled population is perceived by their communities and can negatively impact how they see themselves.

We urge you to support House Bill 281 so that we can remove hurtful and derogatory language about people with disabilities out of Ohio legislation. Thank you for your consideration.